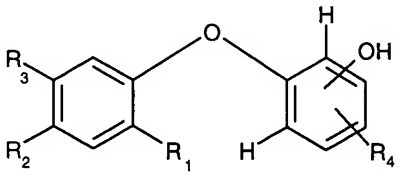
IN THE CLAIMS

Please cancel claims 1-21.

Please add the following claims.

22. (new): An antimicrobial method, which comprises contacting a substrate with an antimicrobially effective amount of a hydroxydiphenyl ether compound of the formula

(1) 

wherein, when OH is in the para position with respect to the ether linkage,

R_1 is C_1-C_{20}alkyl, C_5-C_7cycloalkyl, C_1-C_6alkylcarbonyl, C_1-C_{20}alkoxy, phenyl or phenyl-C_1-C_3-alkyl;

R_2 is hydrogen;

R_3 is C_1-C_{20}alkyl or C_1-C_{20}alkoxy;

R_4 is hydrogen; and wherein,

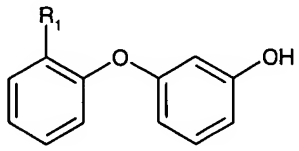
when OH is in the meta position with respect to the ether linkage,

R_2 is hydrogen, C_1-C_{20}alkyl, hydroxy substituted C_1-C_{20}alkyl or C_1-C_6alkylcarbonyl;

R_1 and R_3 are independently of each other hydrogen or C_1-C_{20}alkyl;

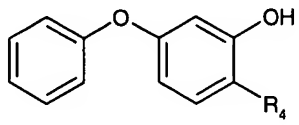
R_4 is hydrogen, hydroxy substituted C_1-C_{20}alkyl or C_5-C_7cycloalkyl.

23. (new): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22, wherein a compound of formula

(6) 

wherein R_1 is C_1-C_5alkyl is employed.

24. (new): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22, wherein a compound of formula

(7) 

wherein R_4 is C_1-C_5alkyl is employed.

25. (new): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22 which is carried out during finishing of undyed and dyed or printed fibre materials.

26. (new): A method according to claim 22 for the antimicrobial treatment of skin, mucous membranes or hair, which comprises applying an antimicrobially effective amount of a compound of the formula (1) as defined in claim 22 thereto.

27. (new): A method of use of a compound of formula (1) as defined in claim 22, which comprises the incorporation of an antimicrobially effective amount of said compound into polymeric materials or the antimicrobial finishing of said polymeric materials with an antimicrobially effective amount of a compound as defined in claim 22.

28. (new): A method according to claim 22 for the antimicrobial treatment of a hard surface, which comprises contacting the hard surface with an antimicrobially effective amount of a compound of the formula (1) as defined in claim 22.

29. (new): A method for the antimicrobial treatment of teeth and gums, which comprises applying an antimicrobially effective amount of a compound of the formula (1) as defined in claim 22 thereto.

30. (new): A personal care composition comprising at least one compound of formula (1) as defined in claim 22 and a cosmetically tolerable carrier or auxiliary.

31. (new): An oral care composition comprising at least one compound of formula (1) as defined in claim 22 and a carrier or auxiliary.

32. (new): A detergent composition comprising at least one compound of formula (1) as defined in claim 22 and a carrier or auxiliary.

33. (new): A compound of formula (1) as defined in claim 22, wherein OH is in the meta position with respect to the ether linkage and R_2, R_3 and R_4 are hydrogen and R_1 is C_1-C_{20} alkyl, or wherein OH is in the para position with respect to the ether linkage and R_2 and R_4 are hydrogen and R_1 and R_3 are C_1-C_{20}alkyl.

34. (new): A process for the preparation of a compound as defined in claim 33, comprising reacting a substituted phenol with an ether substituted halogenophenol in the presence of alkali and a catalytically active quantity of copper or of a copper compound, then heating the resulting alkyloxybenzol compound in the presence of a hydrogen halide and an acid.

35. (new): A compound of formula (1) as defined in claim 22, wherein OH is in the meta position with respect to the ether linkage and R_1, R_2 and R_3 are hydrogen and R_4 is in the para position with respect to the ether linkage and is C_1-C_6alkylcarbonyl.

36. (new): A process for the preparation of a compound according to claim 35, which comprises reacting an acyl chloride with a phenoxyphenol in the presence of activated zinc at a temperature of between 70°C to 80°C, then heating the resulting acyl compound at a temperature of 145°C to 150°C in the presence of aluminum chloride.

37. (new): A compound of formula (1) as defined in claim 22, wherein OH is in the meta position with respect to the ether linkage and R_1, R_2 and R_3 are hydrogen and R_4 is in the para position with respect to the ether linkage and is C_1-C_{20}alkyl.

38. (new): A process for the preparation of a compound according to claim 37, which comprises reacting an acyl chloride with a phenoxyphenol in the presence of activated zinc at a temperature of between 70°C to 80°C, then heating the resulting acyl compound at a temperature of 145°C to 150°C in the presence of aluminum chloride, then refluxing the resulting acylated phenol in the presence of amalgamated zinc, hydrochloric acid and a solvent.